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RUEHBU/AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES PRIORITY 0296
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS PRIORITY 1039
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 0053
RUEHME/AMEMBASSY MEXICO PRIORITY 0562
RUEHMN/AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO PRIORITY 0984
RUEHLA/AMCONSUL BARCELONA PRIORITY 2234
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MADRID 002893

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TAGS: PREL IS LE SY CU SP

SUBJECT: SPAIN: DEPUTY FM LEON ON MIDEAST CONFERENCE,
BILATERAL RELATIONS, LATIN AMERICA

REF: A. CLEMENTS-MADRID POL E-MAIL OF 11/13

¶B. MADRID 2776
¶C. MADRID 2792
¶D. MONTEVIDEO 1068

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Classified By: DCM Hugo Llorens; reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

¶1. (C) Summary. In a wide ranging November 14 meeting with MFA Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Bernardino Leon, DCM reviewed the state of bilateral relations, relayed USG concerns regarding Spain's call for a new major Middle East conference, and discussed U.S. interest in stronger U.S.-Spain cooperation in Latin America. Leon said that bilateral relations were good, but that the delay in the announcement of a date for the visit of the Secretary to Spain has generated skepticism in the Spanish leadership that she intends to come. On Spain's proposal of a Middle East conference, Leon said that the MFA is focused on organizing a commemoration of the 1991 Madrid Mideast Conference, with the objective of generating a more positive atmosphere in the region. A Spanish NGO affiliated with the ruling Socialist party has contacted former President Bush to gauge his interest in participating in such a commemoration. Leon said that Spain understands that conditions are not right for a major political conference, but said FM Moratinos believed that outside parties could help create better conditions by calling on all sides to implement a full cease fire, promoting the release of kidnapped Israeli soldiers, and ramping up engagement on the formation of a viable Palestinian government. On Cuba, Leon asserted that Spain has begun quietly circulating language in Brussels for a possible EU statement, though it was not clear whether this would be a joint or unilateral statement. On the Argentina/Uruguay paper mill dispute, Leon said Spain was investigating whether both countries truly desired King Juan Carlos' good offices to help settle the issue before getting the King involved. End Summary.

//BILATERAL RELATIONS//

¶2. (C) In his initial courtesy call with Leon, the DCM underlined the USG's appreciation for Leon's role in

improving bilateral relations and engagement on issues of mutual interest. He reviewed recent visits by U.S. Attorney General Gonzales, Treasury DepSec Kimmitt, DEA Administrator Tandy, and other USG officials as indicative of the depth of the bilateral relationship and of the USG's interest in Spain as a partner. DCM cautioned that some European observers seemed to be making too much of the recent U.S. elections and did not understand that there would not be a dramatic shift in U.S. foreign policy as a result of those elections. The DCM indicated that we had not yet heard of a date for a visit by the Secretary, but that it was a matter of importance to the Department and to the Embassy. Leon said that the fact that no date had been fixed for a visit by the Secretary had generated skepticism within the Spanish leadership that she would come at all. He said that he no longer raised the possibility in meetings with the King or senior officials, since the issue was viewed with certain irritation. However, Leon described the overall state of the bilateral relationship as "very good."

//MIDDLE EAST CONFERENCE//

13. (C) DCM reviewed Ref A points discussing USG concerns with regard to Spain's promotion of a major Middle East conference (Ref B). He emphasized that conditions were not right for such a conference and that it could do more harm than good to push for a global settlement at a time when the international community was working on getting the parties to undertake simple confidence building measures. (NOTE: According to Spanish media, President Zapatero used a November 13 event related to the Alliance of Civilizations to say that Spain would announce an initiative on the Middle East the week of November 20 and would seek EU support for this initiative. END NOTE). Leon said that Spain understood that the conditions were not right for a major political conference and that the MFA was focused on organizing a commemoration of the 1991 Madrid Conference as a way to generate a "positive

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atmosphere" in the wake of the "disastrous" war over the summer and subsequent events in the region, including "Israeli mistakes" such as the bombing of a civilian structure in Gaza.

14. (C) Leon said that a commemoration of the 1991 Conference would primarily be intended to recall the role played by the USG, regional actors, and the EU and the successes that conference brought about during the 1990s. He indicated that Spain wanted to involve figures that had helped bring about the 1991 meeting, including former President Bush, whom the Socialist think tank FRIDE had contacted to sound out the possibility of his participation in the commemoration (Leon said the initial response was positive). Leon said Spain's motivation in organizing a commemoration was its view that the situation in the Middle East had gone from bad to worse and required major involvement by the international community to avoid a disaster. He cited Spain's involvement in UNIFIL as giving it a direct stake in promoting peace in the region. Leon said Spain hoped the USG would support a commemoration.

15. (C) Turning again to the possibility of a political conference, Leon reiterated Spain's view that the situation was very bad at the moment. He said FM Miguel Angel Moratinos had known Leon would be meeting the DCM and had asked that Leon convey Moratinos' suggestions for generating improved conditions and reinforcing the work of the Quartet. He said the international community should:

- Call for all parties in the region to immediately cease fire;
- Promote the release of the Israeli soldiers; and
- Ramp up efforts to promote the formation of a Palestinian government.

Leon said the international community had to convey to the parties that a termination of violence would lead to a

meeting to resolve political issues.

//IRAQ//

¶6. (C) DCM thanked Leon for Spain's contribution of \$22 million for the Basra Childrens' Hospital and for Spain's generally increased engagement on Iraq. He cautioned that European observers should not be confused by the results of the U.S. legislative elections - neither of the U.S. political parties wanted to abandon Iraq prematurely. Leon said that, despite the Zapatero Government's doubts about the decision to intervene in Iraq, its policy had been to show solidarity with the U.S. in the rebuilding of Iraq and to provide substantial assistance to the rebuilding process. He noted that Spain was one of the top international contributors to the Iraqi reconstruction and that Iraq was by far the largest beneficiary of Spanish assistance. Leon suggested there was room for closer U.S.-Spanish engagement on Iraq that now that respected voices in the U.S. and elsewhere were acknowledging that mistakes may have been committed and that strategies may have to be adjusted.

//SYRIA//

¶7. (C) The DCM noted that while the USG was aware of Spain's interest in normalizing the international community's relations with Syria, we remained deeply concerned regarding Syria's involvement in destabilizing Lebanon and in other negative activities. Leon said that Syria was a country that could behave "seriously" if it was allowed to take part in the regional framework, but that would "create problems" if it was isolated. He insisted that Syria could not be isolated into submission since Damascus could count on the support of Iran and of its Arab neighbors. He said that UK PM Blair had indicated that it might be time to engage the Syrians and that he had heard of similar advice by U.S. figures. Leon said that Spain would be transparent in its dealings with Syria and would continue to brief the USG on its efforts.

//AFGHANISTAN//

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¶8. (C) The DCM lauded Spain's role in Afghanistan and said that a logical step from the USG's perspective would be for Spain to lift its remaining caveats on the use of Spanish forces in Afghanistan. Leon said that the Ministry of Defense had the lead on this issue, which had come up in the meeting between Secretary Rumsfeld and Spanish MOD Alonso. Leon said that it was his understanding that the MOD was studying the issue and promised that he would mention it to the MOD as well. He noted the November 13 wounding of two Spanish soldiers by a suicide bomber near Herat and ventured that the caveats would be rendered moot by the spread of violence in Afghanistan.

//LATIN AMERICA//

¶9. (C) The DCM said that the USG continued to believe in the value of cooperating with Spain in Latin America and said the U.S. was counting on Spanish leadership within the EU on issues related to Latin America. He said that WHA A/S Shannon might be participating in the Haiti Donors Conference in Madrid at the end of November and that the Embassy would seek a meeting with Leon and others if Shannon was able to attend. Leon said that Spain also valued bilateral cooperation on Latin American and said he would be very pleased to meet with Shannon.

¶10. (C) Leon touched briefly on Cuba, saying that per Leon's conversation with Ambassador Aguirre, Spain was "discreetly" circulating language in Brussels for a possible statement. The DCM pointedly asked Leon whether this would be the joint statement previously discussed by Leon with WHA officials and the Ambassador (Ref C), but Leon did not clarify this point.

¶11. (C) On the Argentina/Uruguay paper mill dispute, the DCM raised reports stemming from the Ibero American Summit indicating that Spain could play a role in resolving the issue (Ref D). Leon said that King Juan Carlos was willing to use his good offices to help the sides reach a settlement, but that the King could not be expected to take on a role as a mediator. He said that Spain was sending a representative to Buenos Aires and to Montevideo to find out whether both sides actually desired a Spanish role in the matter, since even this basic element was not clear. Leon cautioned that the situation between Argentina and Uruguay was truly serious and that it was a terrible development for the region.

//COMMENT//

¶12. (C) It is our sense that FM Moratinos and President Zapatero believe the U.S. Congressional elections and recent shifts in UK positions on Middle East issues have strengthened their hand in pressing for an end to the isolation of Syria and in calling for a Middle East conference. In this conversation, Leon focused on a commemorative and symbolic event, but Israeli and UK diplomats tell us they believe Spain is laying the groundwork for a political conference. (NOTE: The Israeli PolCouns told us that Israel suspects that Spain's objective is the deployment of a UNIFIL-type force to Gaza. END NOTE). Spain is clearly determined to seek EU support for their initiatives at the earliest possible date, building on the support they believe they obtained during the Mediterranean Forum meeting in Alicante, Spain. We pressed Ref A points in the meeting with Leon and will continue to do so with other interlocutors. We believe it would be useful to deploy similar points with Spain's EU allies to ensure that other governments do not confuse our discretion on this matter as agreement with Spain's objectives.

AGUIRRE